Coeur d'Alene Basin Cleanup: 2021 Construction Season Preview

EPA United States Environmental Protection Agency

Region 10

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This year, EPA and our partners have set an ambitious schedule for the Coeur d'Alene Basin Cleanup, also known as the Bunker Hill Superfund Site. If you live in the Silver Valley or are passing through, you may see work crews and large equipment at a number of locations. Cleanup activities help reduce exposure from lead and other harmful metals at the site, protecting people and the environment. Projects by category follow:

Construction

Canyon Complex Repository/Waste Consolidation Area
In April, crews started construction again out at the *Canyon Complex Repository/Waste Consolidation Area (CCR/WCA)* in Canyon Creek. This area is right next to the old "SVNRT repository." Last year, the WCA foundation was completed. This year, approximately 500,000 cubic yards of old SVNRT mine waste will be moved into the new area. Work will wrap up in early November. Once these mine wastes are transferred, the new CCR/WCA drainage system will be expanded into the old SVNRT area in 2022. This will create more space for future waste. The facility will be ready to take in mine waste from other mine and mill cleanup sites in the Canyon Creek area in 2023. When finished, the new WCA will be able to hold about 1.8 million cubic yards of mine waste. Repositories and waste consolidation areas like this one reduce health risks from metals like lead and arsenic.

Last season, crews placed drain rock over the Canyon Complex Repository/Waste Consolidation Area footprint.

Canyon Creek Quarry The Trust's contractors also will be processing clean rock up the hill from the CCR/WCA at the Canyon Creek Quarry. As part of the WCA construction, the Trust purchased a 23-acre parcel that they started using last season as a quarry. This property is located 2.7 miles east of the CCR/WCA, and will supply clean construction materials, different sized gravel, and road surfacing materials to the CCR/WCA, as well as to other remedial action projects in the Canyon Creek Basin.

Lower East Fork Ninemile Creek in Ninemile Basin: From mid-June through October, crews will be hauling mine waste (30,000 cubic yards) from the upper portion of the Lower East Fork Ninemile Creek Riparian Site to the *East Fork Ninemile Waste Consolidation Area*. This work will improve water quality and protect people and wildlife from metals exposure.

Gray's Meadow, Lower Basin**:** Upgrades to the Cave Lake wetland pumping infrastructure were completed in April. Lamb's Peak wetland infrastructure improvements will start in mid-September until December. Work will include widening the road next to the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes, moving the pump house and piping, and installing a gravity drain to the tie channel. When finished, the Gray's Meadow project in the Lower Basin will convert 700 acres of agricultural lands to wetland and riparian habitat, with native vegetation and cleaner water.

Gray's Meadow Agriculture to Wetland Conversion Project, Lower Basin.

Recreation Sites: EPA makes it a priority to clean up and post health signage at local recreational sites. Many metals-contaminated sites along the Coeur d'Alene River are used by swimmers, fishers, campers, and boaters in the warm summer months. In April, our partner, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality completed a cleanup at the Theater Bridge site in Smelterville. Crews hauled 2,300 cubic yards of contaminated material to Page Repository for disposal. IDEQ also used gravel to cap contaminated soils near the airport, creating a clean access and parking area. Over the years, EPA and its partners have placed dozens of health signs at recreational areas and along the Coeur d'Alene River. This spring, EPA and partners sent packets with lead health information to over 130 property owners along the Coeur d'Alene River. EPA and the Coeur d'Alene Trust expect to sample soils at a few recreation locations this field season.

One of dozens of health signs at recreational sites throughout the Basin.

***Lower Burke Canyon Repository*:** EPA estimates about 500 truckloads of contaminated material will be hauled to the repository this season. Waste will mostly come from Institutional Controls Program projects, such as the sewer line project in Mullan. Hauling will take place from now through October, dependent on waste supply. The Trust, EPA, and Panhandle Health District (which runs the Institutional Controls Program) are committed to limiting impacts to the local community. The Trust and PHD will continue to monitor the haulers coming into the repository this season. Following are measures designed to reduce impacts from truck traffic.

About 500 truckloads of contaminated material will be hauled to Lower Burke Canyon Repository this season.

1. Truckers are expected to comply with traffic rules, including speed limits. Speed notification signs are in use along the travel routes. Trucks using the repository use State Highway 4 (also known as Canyon Creek Road). This road has a speed limit of 35 mph in the lower section of Canyon Creek, and 45 mph through the LBCR access road. Speeds are set by the Idaho Transportation Department. The Shoshone County Sheriff serves this area. While EPA cannot reduce this speed limit or enforce against traffic violations, we will continue to inform ITD and the Sheriff's Office about any neighborhood complaints.
2. The haulers carrying contaminated material are required to cover their loads. Any truck that arrives at the repository is allowed to dump that load, but any hauler without a tarp is given a warning and is not allowed to return a second time without a tarp.
3. Haulers can bring waste to LBCR during normal hours of 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. ICP waste is sometimes delivered outside of these hours, using a gate access card provided by the ICP.
4. Trucks delivering waste during normal hours go through a decontamination process before going back on the road.
5. Trucks delivering waste through the ICP entrance are required to stay on the clean material cap. They are not decontaminated before leaving the site. The Trust's contractors wet down the waste area as needed to reduce dust.

Investigations to Inform Cleanup Design

EPA is getting ready for this season's design investigations and cleanup projects. Over the years, we've been removing metals-contaminated materials from old mine and mill sites. This source control work prevents the contaminants from washing downstream, improving water quality and reducing exposures for people and wildlife. Under EPA's direction, the CDA Trust will dig test pits, soil borings, and monitoring wells at the following sites:

Ninemile Creek Riparian Area, Ninemile Basin (below Dayrock to confluence with South Fork CDA River): August-September/Initial design investigation.

Black Bear/Flynn**,** Canyon Creek Basin: August/Design investigation.

Gem Mine Complex, Canyon Creek Basin: August-September/Design investigation.

Standard Mammoth Sites, Canyon Creek Basin: July-August/Design investigation.

Canyon Creek Upper Sites, Canyon Creek Basin (Ajax No. 3, Canyon Creek Garbage Dump, Marsh Mine, Oneill Gulch Unnamed Rock Dump): July-August/Initial investigation.

Gem Millsite Complex in Canyon Creek Basin.

Douglas Mine and Mill Site**,** East Fork of Pine Creek, Upper Basin: This year, crews will perform ongoing water sampling to check on water levels. Crews will also check water quality of surface water and water flowing from adits.

Lower Basin Coeur d'Alene River Channel**:** Investigation to collect samples and measure erosion in beds and banks of river in support of River Channel Pilot Project. Late summer/fall.

CDA Trust Property near Rose Lake**,** Lower Basin: Soil sampling and geotechnical borings. Sampling this summer will determine if the property is suitable to supply clean soil, gravel, and stone for cleanup activities. The property may be a suitable location for a Waste Consolidation Area, but soil investigations and other site characterization would need to be done before it could be considered for a WCA. EPA will consider all potential and available properties before selecting a location for a WCA.

Pilot Projects

Pilot projects are used to test methods and technologies, to make sure they're working before we put them into action.

Gray's Meadow, Lower Basin**:** Pilot project at Cave Lake Field to evaluate tilling methods for reducing metals concentrations in soil. July/August.

Operations and Maintenance, Systems Optimization/Fine-tuning

Groundwater Collection System and Central Treatment Plant upgrades in the Bunker Hill Box: Operations and testing of the integrated system will continue this summer to optimize treatment of mine water and groundwater, and make sure the system is working as designed to improve water quality in the South Fork Coeur d'Alene River. Ongoing through October.

In 2021, the Coeur d'Alene Work Trust, under EPA's direction, expects to spend $24.7 million on designs, field investigations, and construction.

For More Information

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